6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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where in deep puddles which slowly extend till by the middle of June the whole surface of the country, except for occasional higher land, is under water. Nuerland has then the appearance of a great grass-covered swamp, there being stagnant rivers, lagoons, and pools, wherever there is a depression in the level surface, and islands wherever slightly elevated ridges and knolls rise from the ground. On these elevated spots are perched the Nuer villages. 131

The rivers begin to fall about the same time as the rains begin to cease. Nuerland then dries quickly. The blazing sun evaporates the surface water while the streams instead of being channels of overflow from the rivers now begin to feed the rivers, and lower drain their basins, as they sink in their beds. The grasses are dry enough by the middle of November for the Nuer to commence to fire them and by the middle of December most of the country has been burnt and the surface is cracked into deep fissures. So parched is it at this season that it is difficult to find enough water for men and beasts. The wet and dry seasons are therefore very pronounced in Nuerland. 132 133

The main characteristics of the country are (i) that it is dead flat, (ii) that it has clayey soils, (iii) that it is mainly treeless, (iv) that it is covered with high grasses in the rains, (v) that it is subject to a heavy seasonal rainfall, (vi) that all its rivers flood, and (vii) that when the rains cease and the rivers fall it is subject to a season of severe drought. 130

A year in which the rivers are low is probably not so serious for the Nuer as a year in which there is little rain. Nevertheless, when the rivers are low the clay beds may not hold up sufficient water to enable the grasses to spring up again after the annual firing, and the inland watercourses, which to a great extent rely for their water on the flooding of the rivers, may fail early in the dry season and compel the people to move to lakes and river banks earlier than they would normally do, and there may also be a shortage of marsh pasturage which is usually the mainstay of the cattle at the end of the dry season. On the other hand, if there is insufficient rain the millet crop dies and the grasses, deprived of subterranean supplies of water, do not spring 312